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ABSTRACT

The incoherences and the ambiguities of Africa's educational system in which, especially at its higher level, a real African life does not exist result from institutions aimed more at transplanting a European pattern (or an American pattern) rather than implanting the university in the life of African countries and adjusting to African needs. The university should be a center where one would elaborate an expression specific to Africa, actualize the values of its traditions, and draw inspiration from the African past. Instead of artificially accepting an imposing foreign culture, the university should be fit to rediscover or create from African experience a new culture, in other words, a new way of expression. It is the task of the university to solve the much debated question of the cultural unity of Africa, a question essential for the political development of African unity. An institution is recommended that would specialize in applied research to further develop the drive to restore and stimulate culture that will give back to the peoples of Africa a sense of their identity and to the community their historical destiny. (Author/KE)

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THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

by

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There is a great deal of agreements about what one might consider as the traditional roles of the University. Be it in the realm of teaching or research, the University could not break away from the obligation of upholding its quality and its high standard, in order to achieve its objectives. In the same way, it goes without saying that the University should highly consider the importance of scientific and technical knowledge which leads to the transformation of the environment for the human benefit.

But with regard to the choice of the specific structures and contents of the teaching proper to solving the problems of Africa, Universities tend to disagree and to adopt positions that are so different that they seem difficult to reconcile. In fact, these positions are highly dependent upon the idea one has of the role and the possibilities of the African Universities and the way one wants to build Africa and relate it to other continents.

Does the University in Africa only have to carry on her traditional functions by strictly confining herself to the rules which are considered to be valid in advanced countries? Shouldn't the University rather give a priority to some forms of activity which are precisely meant to help Africa to become more acquainted with her own problems?

Until these last years, it has been observed in Africa that the founders of the institutions of higher learning aimed more at transplanting a European pattern (or an American pattern) rather than implanting the University in the life of our countries and adapting it

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to our own needs. This explains the incoherences and the ambiguities of our educational system in which, especially at its higher level, a real African life does not seem to exist.

Everywhere complaints have been made about the inadaptation of our Universities, their lack of originality and, above all, the betrayal of their specific vocation: that of the guardians of our artistic, literary and spiritual heritage. The emphasis laid on the African vocation of the University is more and more imperative and no institution can ignore it. Such a claim is quite obvious though it often looks obsessing when one bears in mind the historical conditions in which the African University was created. As a matter of fact, given its assimilationist outlook, the colonial administration could hardly conceive and consider the problems of the Universities in terms of the native peoples' activities and culture. Therefore, at this post-colonial era, it is essential that "Africa" be taught again to the Africans, particularly to the elites who have been educated in foreign countries. It is also advisable that the masses holding a secular tradition be made fully aware of their African character, in order to offer the post-independence generation images of great ancestors drawn from the past history of the Continent so as to raise enthusiasm capable of leading to great endeavours.

It seems very clear to us that main task proper to the University in Africa is to get itself deeply rooted and to root the African man into the socio-cultural realities of the continent.

During the recent conference of Caen dealing with university problems, the French Minister of National Education exclaimed:

"The University of a country is the image of a society. The American University is the image of American life. Transfer an American or a German specimen to the French country, death would immediately occur".

This opinion particularly applies to the situation of the Universities in Africa. Their strength is such that they would not die for having imitated the French, the English or the Belgian pattern, but they will not be able to play their real part unless a programme of readjustment and adaptation could give them an original character

and could help them to serve better the communities where they are implanted.

In order to acquire a true personality and assume their share of the responsibilities of building up a united Africa, through a spiritual environment which only the University is able to create, the programmes must be elaborated in such a way that their contents be grounded in our national realities, namely the language, the traditions and the specific values constituting the common soul of Africa.

Thus the Universities will provide our societies with intellectual means as much necessary to their development as the economic resources.

However, there is no blinking the fact that carrying out the task of integrating African cultures is not as easy as one may think.

The social and political structures of African traditional societies which are often fragmented have been the monopoly of few researchers who have settled down to the ethnographic research of Africa.

Whether one chooses it or not, this research has often been closely connected with the colonial fact in the past. The dealings of the researchers too often aimed at justifying the colonisation by denying the existence of renown cultures or they simply had in view the collection of objects which were intended to be preserver in museums out of Africa, thus defrauding their legitimate owners of enjoying the right of an important part of the heritage of African culture.

Nevertheless, had this work of pioneer not been achieved by the Western Scholars, the constitution of a renown African science would have been difficult or even impossible to think of.

But we also know that dialogues and confrontations contribute to the making of science. Therefore, it is most urgent that the African researchers give, as a unique contribution, a new meaning to the cultures which are the expression of the most intimate part or their real life.

This work of rousing African cultures should be done in the

University with unbounded breadth as compared with what is being done at present. The University should be a Centre where one would elaborate an expression specific to Africa.

The University should safeguard an asset of cultural experiments which she is holding and she should be fit to bear witness for the African civilisation. Once restored, this civilisation will constitute the source of thoughts and actions of the elites and the people in order to create new horizons and to enrich the human culture.

The University should not confine herself to the gathering and preservation of the traditions, she should instead actualize the value of these traditions and protect the data from the meaninglessness arising out of the use of modern techniques which stand to empty them of their soul and ostrange them from the human realities which are their ultimate supports.

In the first place, the University should proclaim the permanence of the African values through the vicissitudes of the history of men and civilisations. By working on the re-evaluation of the African past, the University will contribute to the intellectual and moral emancipation of the Africans, allowing them to be on equal footing with the rest of the world, after the traumatism of the colonial period.

It goes without saying that the University should not restrict herself to safeguarding and preserving the different modes of thoughts and doings of the traditional past. She should integrate the original contributions which she holds as soon as the human groups are renewed and ready to accept any external influence.

Far from being a mere expression of the instinct of preservation, this emphasis on the prominence of the African personality is intended to meet a positive need: to enlarge the consciousness of the world. Africa will only achieve her maturity when she will be capable of exerting an influence on the other civilisations, giving them some of the elements of their value system.

During the colonial period, the African society did not have the means nor the necessary reputation to exert such an influence. Certainly the influence of the art of the Black people on the development of the contemporary Western art did exist. But the emphasis

of the prominence of the originality peculiar to the African thought should allow this influence to be exerted in all fields.

In many realms of thoughts, it has been observed that the full implication of research goes beyond the African field which, some fifty years ago, has been the seat of discoveries which have thrown into confusion the ancient thoughts on the origin of humanity.

All over the world, scholars believe that Africa is the cradle of the "homo-sapiens". Psychologically, people of this continent, who are supposed to have no history, do not ignore the fact that, according to Basile Davidson, they have gone through twenty centuries of successive stages of development which can be identified whereas research relating to medieval and pre-medieval history is only at the outset. In the philosophical field, specialists bring to light imposing conceptions based on principles different from aristotelian logics and which, however, cause universal amazement because of their extraordinary similarity with recent theories of contemporary physics.

Thus, the "Dogon cosmogony", based on analogy and symbolism, has been able to create metaphysical thoughts which are as wonderful as those belonging to ancient Greece.

The secret of the amazing vitality of the Africans finds its origin in the Bantu thoughts which has allowed millions of men to adapt themselves to very difficult conditions of survival and development.

The Bambara pedagogy has brought to light the existence of a lot of initiation schools where psychology, sociology and theology are being taught in ways which are certainly different from the Western procedures but the richness of which bears witness to the understanding of man which the greatest masters of modern psycho-analysis would not disclaim.

These are only a few examples which confirm, if need be, the necessity for the African University to draw its inspiration from the African past.

If it is true that Africa should know all about herself before fulfilling herself, check off her wealth before creating a culture by means of the assimilation of the foreign techniques, which institution

other than the University is fit to constitute an African science, that is, give an objective foundation to the poets' intuitions, and the romanticism of the literary men and the historians? The role of the University will consist in striking with exactness, and not intuitively, the balance of that which is original in the African civilisation. This conversion to science will constitute the most original contribution of the University to the cultural development of Africa.

The task of the University is not restricted to the elaboration and the spreading of knowledge and techniques which lead to command nature. She should particularly secure the full mastery of the culture belonging to the continent.

The spiritual and moral values which our tradition has created are necessary if we want to victoriously confront, without being seriously unbalanced, the inevitable irruption of the industrial civilisation in our continent. Only these values have the power to vouch the permanence of our identity through the considerable confusion caused by the technical development and the tremendous soaring of the means of transport.

In order to allow the peoples of Africa to gather, to trace a common tradition, the University research should be able to establish, by means of indisputable methods, the community of origin, the relationship between manners, the parallel progress of civilisations, the multitude of migrations and the mutual influences which grant the continent with a community of real identity.

Instead of artificially accepting an imposed foreign culture, the University should be fit to rediscover or create, from the African experience, a new culture or, in other words, a new way of expression.

The University should concentrate and dissolve all the scattered and divided elements in order to increase in the first place the internal power of our cultures, and then, their ability to radiate and their creative power.

It is the task of the University to solve the much debated question of the cultural unity of Africa, question however essential for the political development of the African unity. Presently, no one denies

the cultural unity of the West; nonetheless, it is possible to distinguish in it three main form of different cultures, namely the Latin, the Anglo-Saxon and the Slavonic cultures.

Why shouldn't the African University settle down to the legitimate task of having an original socio-cultural character which would somehow be the common womb of all African civilisations?

The University should prove that these civilisations derived from common sources and had been developed through similar experiences. They have undergone the same ways and, likewise, they have struggled for independence and freedom. Who could be doubtful today that the underlining of the prominence of the relationship between the artistic, intellectual and spiritual themes, the making of people more aware of their common civilisation and situation could not help our peoples to their continental integration?

One would not overstress the role of the University in the cultural development of Africa. Beyond the extreme diversity of civilisations and the multiplicity of languages spoken in Africa, the university research should strive to discover the common roots of the apparent differences and to find the spirit of a civilisation, unique in its essence.

President Senghor writes: "What unites us is beyond history! It is deeply rooted in prehistory. It is a result of geography, ethnicity, and hence, culture. It is prior to Christianity and Islam; it is prior to any colonisation. It is this community which I call "Africanity". It is the whole set of African values. Should this community appear under its Negro-African aspect, africanity always has the same characteristics of passion in the feelings, vigor in the expression.

Together, we have to create a common soul. We have this soul which is embodied in Africanity. We only have to become aware of it and assume it. This implies that we should, in the first place, reject any racial, linguistic and religious fanaticism".

The cultural research at the University should contribute to discover and to spread the African historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological and linguistic datum.

The University should not confine herself to drawing up a precise and complete inventory of cultural productions. She should strive to carry out a choice and write down everything that is the expression of the profound tendencies and the aspirations of our societies in the past and in the present times.

The elements thus selected will be used as a model and as an example, so as to keep alive the restored cultural tradition thus allowing its expansion and its fulfilment. They shall guide and inspire men of the present and the future.

In our opinion, the revival and the diffusion of the message which has been expressed by the most valid productions of the past and the present will be a glorious achievement for the University in Africa.

In order to accomplish such a duty, the University, in every country, should help the authorities to define a coherent and efficient cultural policy. She should set up a system capable of conceiving the programmes and of carrying out cultural action on a large scale.

That is why we would recommend the creation of an Institution specialised in applied research. A permanent cell of researchers affected to this Institution would be in charge of research and teaching.

In this condition only, it will be possible to further develop the initiation into a restored and stimulated culture that will give back to the peoples of Africa the sense of their profound identity and of the community of their historical destiny.

The fact that African peoples have been made aware of their own cultural personality constitutes one of the most important data of contemporary history.

The intellectual effort undertaken by thinkers and statemen in order to give an account of the current process of evolution so as to conciliate it with the interests of our peoples, is a decisive contribution to the progress of our countries.

Being still a poor continent and depending almost entirely on the external investments, Africa is in a hurry; she has to get rid of

illiteracy, chronic malnutrition, disease and misery. She knows that she has to assimilate urgently the best of what the industrial civilisation offers her, in order to make up for the lost time.

But the University should realise the fact that real progress is not possible for our continent unless the values which condition the cultural approach of our peoples are preserved, in order to activate the new course of things and to operate a link between the renaissance of the traditional world and the contemporaneous values.

What should one do in order to keep his identity in a world that is constantly changing? The renaissance to a free life of a continent like Africa is not a simple political development. It is the contents of our whole civilisation that is at stake.

This civilisation, because of its hardened and corrupted forms, is partly responsible for the temporary inefficiency in solving the main problems of economic and social development. An exceptional effort is required in order to release the old mentality, that is, a passive surrender to the fate, characteristic of the culture belonging to the peoples who have been subdued for a long time. It is this mental liberation that will give the men of Africa the will to progress, to assume the entire responsibility of their history and to transform the destiny into project.

Who else better than the restored African University is able to "re-introduce" our peoples to the world and to "re-invent" their solidarity?

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

THE UNIVERSITY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Chairman: The Chairman of the Conference, Dr Tshibangu

Rapporteur: Dr. R. L. Weeks

— i —

There was discussion of the university's role in social and cultural engineering in Africa. This engineering when consciously carried out, has to be guided by four imperatives

first, indigenise what is foreign
second, idealise what is indigenous
third, nationalise and unify what is sectional and
fourth emphasize what is African.

This is the meeting point between political and cutural development.

The cultural subjects and the humanities might have the most direct political relevance, though there was some disagreement about this. A contrary opinion was that the sciences by improving technology and welfare also affected political life fundamentally.

— ii —

There was discussion as to whether the most basic political crises in contemporary Africa were the crisis of national integration (making different groups accept each other as fellow countrymen) and the crisis of political legitimacy (establishing institutions which command authority and acceptance as legitimate by the population as a whole).